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THE PERSIAN PERIOD



FATHER FELIX, O.M. CAP. ISS.

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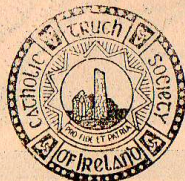
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THE PERSIAN PERIOD

By FATHER FELIX, O.F.M.Cap., L.S.S.

For two centuries (538-332 B.C.) the Jews were subjects of the Persian empire, and Palestine was a province of the satrapy of Abar-Naharah—"the country beyond the River (Euphrates)." The Persian satrap or governor lived in Samaria (1 Esdras 4, 10). He ruled for "the great king," and his principal concerns were the levying of taxation and the conscription of a troop of soldiers for the imperial army.

This period saw great developments in the Jewish nation. The rank and title of "*prince of Juda*" (1 Esdras 1, 8) died with Zorobabel; and his place as leader of the people was taken by the high priest. A senate or sanhedrin of seventy-one members, modelled on the prescriptions of Numbers 11, 6 and Deuteronomy 17, 8, assisted the high priest in administering the Law. Early in this period also the Samaritans formed a religious schism. They accepted of the Old Testament only the five Books of Moses. They worshipped Yahweh in a temple of their own on Mount Garizim; and they were bitterly hostile to the Jews.

Sadly reduced in numbers and prestige and surrounded by enemies, the Jews lived unnoticed and unknown in this period while Persia and Greece held the stage of history. Their only consolation now was the Law; they had the divine revelation and the promise that it held of the Messias to come. In this period and in the following (the Greek period) there was a class known as "*the wise (men)*" (Ecclesiasticus 39, 1-15)—men of prayer who meditated on the Law and the Prophets, and studied and collected the sacred lore of the past. The fruit of their prayer and study they communicated to their disciples. Some of their number were inspired to write the philosophical or Sapiential or Wisdom Books of the Old Testament.

The Sapiential Books are seven in number: The Psalms,⁽¹⁾ which were completed and collected early in this period; Job; Proverbs; The Canticle of Canticles;

(1) For the Book of Psalms see number 7 of this series, pages 20-21.

Ecclesiastes; Wisdom; Ecclesiasticus. The last three of these books belong to the next (the Greek) period.

There is a real appropriateness in the number seven: there are the "seven pillars" of Wisdom (Proverbs 9, 1); and seven in the Scriptures expresses completeness: "Give a portion to seven . . ." (Ecclesiastes 11, 2).

THE BOOK OF JOB.

The author of the Book of Job possessed all the qualities of the perfect dramatist: the gift of poetry; the art of depicting character; the technique of developing a dramatic situation; an insight into human modes of thought which makes the dialogue true to type, yet with no sacrifice of originality. This Book is a classic indeed.

The theme is the problem of human suffering. It had been treated already by the Psalmists, and by Jeremias and Ezechiel; but less fully. The solution given in Job is only a negative one—the problem was to receive a definitive solution only in the Sermon on the Mount and on Calvary. But this negative solution of Job marks a great advance in Old Testament doctrine; and it "prepared the way for the fuller revelation, viz., that the true reward of the just is not temporal prosperity, but eternal life in the presence of God."⁽¹⁾

The prologue (chapters 1-2) is in prose. It sets the stage, so to speak, for the drama which follows; it provides a concrete instance from which to debate the problem. Job, the central character, is mentioned in Tobias 2, 12 and Ezechiel 14, 14. He was, therefore, a historical person of the Patriarchal period whose life-story, handed down by tradition, the author adapts to his purpose.

Job was a rich and respected man of Hus (or Uz) in Edom; blessed with ten children; a religious man: "simple and upright, and fearing God, and avoiding evil" (1, 1). God permitted Satan to put his piety to the test. In one day his flocks were stolen and his slaves slain by nomad robbers; and all his children were killed by the fall of the house in which they were assembled. But Job

(1) *The Book of Job. Translation and Commentary.* By Rev. Edward J. Kissane, D.D., L.S.S. Dublin (Browne & Nolan), 1939. Page xxx.

submitted patiently to the divine will: "*The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away . . . Blessed be the name of the Lord*" (1, 21).

A more severe test followed. He was afflicted with a painful ulcerous disease. His wife, the only one left to him out of his household, became disgusted and angry at his loathsome condition. She derided him for his piety which had won for him no better return than this. Job, however, remained unshaken in faith and confidence; heroically submissive: "*if we have received good things at the hand of God, why should we not receive evil?*" (2, 10). Three Edomite friends, Eliphaz, Baldad, Sophar came to visit him. They found him so afflicted that at first they could not recognise him. For seven days they remained with him mourning in silence. Thus is introduced the discussion in poetry of the problem of suffering (chapters 3-41).

Job begins with a speech of great power and pathos in which he laments his unhappy lot. Death and the quiet of Sheol (the abode of the dead) were far preferable. He regrets he was born, so bitter is the anguish of mind and body. Would that the night of his birth had never beheld "*the eyelids (i.e. the first rays) of the dawn!*" (3, 9—Hebrew).

Eliphaz answers. He assumes as certain the popular notion that temporal happiness is the reward of virtue; temporal misfortune the penalty of sin. His words are the very reverse of comforting: Job, you consoled others formerly; now that you are in trouble yourself, you whimper and blaspheme God. Repent of your sins, and be thankful that you are afflicted for them: "*Blessed is the man whom God correcteth*" (5, 17). These last words are very true indeed; but in the circumstances they were most tactlessly applied to Job.

Job speaks in vigorous defence of his innocence. His suffering is extreme, hence he has complained; he is totally abandoned; his friends are imputing to him sin of which he is not conscious. He reaffirms his faith in God's justice; he prays for death, lest his pain drive him to despair (chapters 6-7).

Baldad now speaks. The pith of his argument is this: your children have come to an untimely end because of their sins; you, however, can yet recover God's favour for yourself. Not a very consoling discourse indeed!

Job asserts his faith in God's power and justice; yet he cannot understand why such terrible suffering should be allotted to him. He knows well that he cannot bring God to law: "*There is no arbiter between us*" (9, 33); but he must speak in his defence. He pleads with God Who created him and favoured him so generously in the past, Whose good Providence has preserved him so lovingly until now (chapters 9-10).

Sophar speaks next. He is annoyed by Job's protestation of innocence. His afflictions are proof of his sinfulness; and Job is a fool not to perceive this. "*Man is born a wild ass's colt*" (11, 12); and Job is no exception to the general rule. Let him crave God's pardon and then he shall be restored.

Sophar's 'comfort' was the most tantalizing yet; and it draws from Job a powerful speech which opens with a stinging sarcasm:

"*Verily, ye are the people* (of intelligence),

And with you wisdom will die" (12, 1—Hebrew).

If they use their eyes, surely they must see that there are sinners who are prosperous and healthy, while there are just men who suffer penury and pain. Everyday experience, therefore, belies the assumption that virtue is rewarded by temporal blessings. God permits the good to suffer and the wicked to prosper; and of course God is just. God requires no advocate to defend Him; least of all will Job's friends further the cause of God by false accusations and rash judgments. Then he speaks to God and proclaims that his conscience, which is the voice of God, does not indict him. He speaks eloquently of the short and sorrowful life of man on earth; of the terrible finality of death; of the dark mystery that is the life beyond the tomb. (chapters 12-14).

Eliphaz appeals to tradition for the view that the happiness of the wicked is apparent and not real. The evil-doer lives in constant anxiety: "*the sound of dread*

is always in his ears" (15, 21); and punishment overtakes him: "*Before his days be full he shall perish*" (15, 32).

Job again complains bitterly of the conduct of his friends whose unkind insinuations increase his anguish. He has cried to God for redress, and his cry has not been answered. He sees no hope for recovery now; already he feels that his life is beginning to ebb: "*only the grave remaineth for me*" (17, 1).

Baldad speaks and his words are bitter and barbed. Job has sinned; does he think himself an exception to the general law? Evil-doers always come to grief; fear, famine, plague, loss of wealth—these are the penalty of sin (chapter 18).

Job again complains of the reproaches in his friends' words. He laments his unhappy lot: he is a victim of every form of physical and mental pain; he is abandoned and desolate, insulted and calumniated; death will soon claim him. He implores his friends to cease from tormenting him. Then in a splendid poem he proclaims his conviction that God will yet vindicate him. So firm is his assurance of this that he warns his friends not to carry their persecution of him further—if they do they will be punished (chapter 19).

Sophar discourses again on the brevity of the evil-doer's prosperity. Ill-gotten goods bring trouble; violence and injustice are always followed by retribution; darkness, fire, a violent death avenge wrong-doing. All this is irrelevant to the case of Job; but the recital adds to his torment, and it tries his patience severely (chapter 20).

Job in reply denies the assumptions on which the case against him is based. He appeals to facts which are plain to be seen. (a) The wicked live to a full age; they prosper; they leave heirs; their flocks thrive; their children are healthy and happy. (b) The wicked continue in prosperity; ruin does *not* overtake them; they die rich. (c) God is just—Job admits this equally with his opponents. But Job wishes to obtain a solution of the pressing problem of his sufferings. (d) It is not true that the death of the wicked is miserable. Their death is as easy and as hard as the death of those who have suffered in-

justice and hardship. The evil-doer is genuinely mourned and honourably buried. Thus, their whole argument is based on falsehood (chapter 20).

Nothing daunted by Job's appeal to facts Eliphaz proceeds to defend the justice of God on the plea that Job must have sinned since he is afflicted. He enters into detail, accusing Job of usury, oppression of the poor, failure to show mercy and to give alms. Job's attitude (he argues) is blasphemous; it is a denial of God's omniscience or else of God's Providence. Job must accept one of two alternatives: either he will persist in his contumacy and incur the punishment which sinners of old incurred; or he will lay aside his pride, be reconciled with God, and recover peace and prosperity (chapter 22).

In the meantime Job's suffering has increased, and now he speaks in a mood bordering on rebellion. If only he could find God, appear before His tribunal, and state his case! Indeed he would convince any just judge of his innocence and secure acquittal and freedom from his present pain. But no! he cannot obtain a hearing. Robbers and oppressors of the poor flout God's law, and yet they are allowed to go immune. Why (he complains) does God not appoint times for bringing evil-doers to justice? Their success encourages the wicked to continue. One would be tempted to think that God does not know what occurs in the world which He Himself created! (chapters 23-24).

Baldad recalls that in former times Job comforted the unfortunate with the revealed and traditional teaching that the prosperity of evil-doers is brief, and that their happiness is apparent, not real (26, 1-4; 27, 7-23)⁽¹⁾

God's wisdom, as manifested in His plan of creation, is described. Human wisdom comes from God; it consists in fearing God and avoiding sin (chapter 28). This poem does not form part of the debate; it is an independent composition.

Job asserts that he has always used his wealth and

(1) Rev. Doctor Kissane argues cogently for this change in the order of the text. It is demanded by the metrical structure, and it makes this portion of the Book more easy of interpretation. (*The Book of Job, etc., pages 163-166*).

prestige to promote mercy and equity. He had looked forward to a happy old age as the reward of a good life. This hope is now destroyed; his wealth has vanished, and he is an object of ridicule (chapter 30).

Sophar speaks eloquently of the greatness, holiness and wisdom of God; of man's weakness, sinfulness and ignorance (25; 26, 5-16).

Job now closes the discussion in a speech of much feeling and great power. He asserts on oath that what he is about to say is true. He too had always understood that God rewarded virtue with prosperity, and punished sin with suffering. But his present experience shows him clearly that this is not so. He makes a careful examination of his life. He reviews the various sins by which the divine law is violated; covetousness; theft; adultery; cruelty towards slaves, the poor, widows and orphans; avarice; pride; idolatry; malice; hatred. He has been guilty of none of these crimes. Again he deplors it that he cannot obtain a fair trial. If only he could, gladly would he state his case! (27, 1-6; 31).

Job's friends have no reply; and now a new speaker comes forward. This is Eliu, a young man who has heard the whole discussion. He is annoyed at the stubbornness of Job, and the failure of the friends to convince Job. Until now he has kept silence because his elders were speaking, but he feels that it is time for him to intervene at last. One thing at least he has learned from the debate, namely, that wisdom is not always possessed by the aged. No, wisdom is the product of genius; and this genius is a gift of God. Eliu has received this gift, so he plunges into the discussion with eager zest and abundant confidence (chapter 32).

In a series of four discourses Eliu answers Job's statement of his case. His speeches are eloquent indeed; and they are well ordered. But in reality he adds little to what the three elders had already put forward. He too argues that Job must have sinned. The fourth discourse is particularly fine where he bids Job to consider the might of God as manifested in nature—in thunder, lightning, snow, rain, storm and frost. From these is

known dimly the "terrible majesty" (37, 22) of their First Cause, God (chapters 33-37).

Yahweh is now introduced as speaking. God first rebukes Job for his rash criticism of the divine plans. What does Job, or any man know of the mystery of creation? Of the ordering of the elements of nature? Of the mystery of life? Of the instincts of animals and birds? And therefore since he does not understand the government of the universe how can he dare to call in question the wisdom and equity of Him Who created it? Job humbly admits that he has no reply to make to this challenge (chapters 38-39).

In a second discourse God speaks of His own power. Job has complained because God permits the good to suffer and the wicked to prosper. Very well, let Job alter this condition of things if he is able! But man cannot do lesser things than this. Take, for instance, the hippopotamus (behemoth) or the crocodile (leviathan); these are creatures of God equally with man, and yet man cannot capture and tame them (chapters 40-41).

Job admits that he has spoken rashly. He retracts his words and expresses his renewed conviction of the might and wisdom of God (42, 1-6).

In the Epilogue Yahweh rebukes Eliphaz and his two companions because in their misguided zeal for God's defence they wrongly imputed sin to Job. They are forgiven through Job's intercession. Job is cured of his disease. His brothers, sisters, relatives and friends come to visit him and they bring gifts to him. His prosperity was greater than before. He was blessed with a new family—seven sons and three daughters; he lived after this for a hundred and forty years, and he saw his children's children (42, 7-16).⁽¹⁾

(1) The Book of Job makes no mention of an eternal reward for human suffering. This was outside the scope of the author. He is concerned only with the doctrine that although the just sometimes suffer temporal evils this is perfectly compatible with the wisdom and providence of God Who can and does bring good out of evil. Here is seen the incompleteness of the revelation of the Old Testament; it was but the preparation for the perfect light of the New: "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (St. John 1, 17).

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS.

In modern usage the word 'proverb' means a pithy, popular expression of practical wisdom, for example: 'Pride goes before a fall.' Like all other peoples the Hebrews had these maxims; and examples are found in the Sacred Books, Jeremias 31, 29; Ezechiel 16, 44. Indeed it would seem that the sample given above is taken from the Book of Proverbs 16, 18, which reads:

"*Pride goeth before destruction:*

And the spirit is lifted before a fall."

But in the title of this Book and in the Bible generally the word 'proverb' is used to translate the Hebrew word 'mashal;' and *mashal* has a wider meaning than our word proverb. *Mashal* means a proverb or a parable. The Hebrew proverbs are usually in the form of a comparison or an antithesis, and in poetry.

The Book of Proverbs is a collection of inspired writings by different authors of different periods. The principal part consists of two collections of King Solomon's parables: 10, 1-22, 16 and 25, 2-29 27; that is to say, nearly eighteen chapters of a total thirty-one. Of the second of these collections it is stated that "*the men of Ezechias king of Juda copied them out*" (25, 1). The word 'copy' or transcribe would indicate that they were already in writing before the time of Ezechias (715-687 B.C.). It is to be presumed that these were added to the first collection, so that the latter would go back further still. In 3 Kings 4, 32 Solomon is described as having *spoken* (not written) his parables and poems. But when or by whom these chapters were committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost is not known.

Besides these two there are five other collections in the Book. This composite nature of *Proverbs* explains the repetitions that occur. The same proverb is sometimes found in two or more collections, and at times a proverb is repeated in the same collection. At the same time there is a real literary unity and one central theme in the whole Book.

The first section (chapters 1-9 inclusive) is a series of

poems written in a beautiful oratorical style. The author (or authors) of these introductory chapters is not known, nor can the date be determined. The purpose and scope of the whole Book is stated in 1, 1-6. These proverbs teach "*doctrine, justice, and judgment and equity*" (1, 3); i.e. education, holiness, honesty and truth. The spirit of the whole is summed up in this maxim:

*"The foundation of wisdom is the fear of God;
Wisdom and instruction fools despise."* (1, 7).

The wisdom of this Book, therefore, is divine. It is based on religion, and it teaches holiness.

The introduction to the "proverbs" proper (1, 8-1, 19) is an exhortation to listen to these words of wisdom; to do good and to avoid evil and evil-doers. "*Length of days and years of life and peace*" (3, 2) are promised to those who remember the Law and observe the precepts which wisdom shall give. Suffering must be accepted with patience, because "*whom the Lord loveth he chastiseth*" (3, 12).

True wisdom comes from God as from its source; and its worth may be gauged by the magnificence of the material creation. To possess it is to be free from vain fear, and to have the protection of God. It is obtained by the practice of virtue; and the practice of virtue begins from self-mastery. On the other hand keen remorse and hopeless misery will overtake those who refuse instruction and despise reproof (5, 12).

Wisdom personified now speaks. Wisdom in this context is uncreated, divine. This marks a great advance in Old Testament theology; it is only one step removed from the revelation of the real distinction of Persons in God. "*I (Wisdom) was set up (i.e. established) from eternity, and of old before the earth was made. The depths were not as yet, and I was already conceived . . . When he prepared the heavens I was present . . .*" (8, 23-24 . . . 27) Thus was the way prepared gradually for the full brilliance of the revelation of the New Testament: "*In the beginning was the Word . . . The Word was God . . . All things were made by Him . . . the Word was made flesh . . .*" (St. John 1, 1 . . . 3 . . . 14).

The first collection of Solomon's parables (10, 1-22, 16) comprises short maxims in poetic couplets. A chief feature of Hebrew poetry is parallelism, i.e. the second line of the poem offsets the first either by antithesis (contrast) or by development. In chapters 10 to 15 we have antitheses (with a few exceptions, e.g. 14, 19):

"Hatred arouses strifes:

While charity covers every fault" (10, 12).

There is here a twofold contrast between *hatred* which *arouses*, and *charity* which *covers*. Another good example is:

"The just provides for the needs of his beasts;

But the wicked are pitiless" (12, 10).

In the proverbs from 16, 1-22, 16 the parallelism is with few exceptions the parallelism of development; for example:

*"To man belongs the preparation of the mind
(i.e. thought)*

But to God its expression by the tongue" (16, 1).

The proverbs are concerned primarily with personal holiness, and they range the wide field of the virtues: humility and meekness; chastity; modesty; sobriety; truth; honesty; industry; fortitude; docility; prudence; mercy. But there is occasionally a reminder that the national welfare depends on virtuous citizens:

"The blessing of the honest builds the city;

But the mouth of the wicked destroys it" (11, 11).

Social philosophy finds a place, of course:

"Better a plate of herbs where there is love

Than a fatted calf served up with hatred" (15, 17).

Many of the proverbs speak of the Providence of God:

"Let the horse be prepared for the day of battle,

Yet the victory is in the power of God" (21, 31).

A fine example of irony in the description of the fantastic difficulties which are suggested by laziness:

"The slothful man saith: There is a lion without.

I shall be slain in the midst of the streets" (22, 13).

"*The words (i.e. sayings) of the wise*" (22, 17) is the title of the next two collections (22, 17-24, 22 and 24, 23-34). There is a brief poem of introduction exhorting

the reader to attend to the teaching of Wisdom (22, 17-21). Here occurs that proverb which is better known than understood, and oftener quoted than interpreted:

"For the just, if he fall seven times, rises again;

But the wicked is overcome with misfortune" (24, 16). There is reference here not to sin, but to temporal misfortunes from which the just man recovers because he has the protection of God. "Seven times" is a Hebrew way of expressing 'frequently.'

In the second collection of Solomon's proverbs (25, 2-29, 7) many individual and social virtues and vices are described with both wealth and subtlety of illustration. In this section is proposed the high ideal of returning good for evil:

"If thy enemy be hungry, give him to eat;

If he be thirsty give him water to drink . . ." (25, 21).

This norm of virtue is quoted in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans 12, 20, as falling nowise short of the ideal of perfect Christian charity.

There is a proverb directed against false piety:

*"He who turns away his ear so as not to hear the Law,
Even his prayer is an abomination"* (28, 9).

True piety is founded on fear of God and perfected in love of God; therefore true piety of necessity includes the observance of the Law of God. This is clear in the Gospel words: "If you love me, keep my commandments" (St. John 14, 15). There is also an interesting proverb which speaks of the necessity of revelation:

*"Without revelation (literally—'vision') the people
become lawless;*

But he who observes the Law—blessed is he" (29, 18).

The last two collections are appendices to the Book proper: "The words of Agur, Son of Yakeh, of Massa"⁽¹⁾ (chapter 30), and "The words of Lamuel (or Lemuel), king of Massa" (chapter 31). Who these men were is un-

(1) Brown, Driver, Briggs (*Hebrew Lexicon*) think that Massa is in Northern Arabia. Father Vaccari, S.J. (*I Libri Poetici* . . . page 263) accepts this as probable; but he adds a reminder that massa may well be a common noun meaning 'revelation,' as in Isaiah 13, 1.

known; but they were Hebrews at all events, for they worshipped Yahweh, the one true God.

The sayings of Agur are introduced by a short poem which speaks of the transcendental nature of God as deducible from the marvels of the material creation (30, 1-4). He praises the word of God—the revelation which God has communicated to the Chosen People (30, 5-6); and he prays for 'the golden mean':

"Remove far from me falsehood and lying words;

Give me neither poverty nor riches,

But give me the necessities of life:

Lest abounding I should deny

And say: Who is Yahweh?

Or, being impoverished, I should steal" (30, 8-9).

The sayings of Lamuel begin with a statement of the sound principles of virtue in which this king's good mother had trained him in preparation for his royal office (31, 2-9): avoid luxury; cultivate moderation and generosity; enforce the law with prudent zeal and strict impartiality; protect the weak and the helpless. Then (31, 10-31) Lamuel sings the praises of his mother and proposes her as the model wife and mother—"*a valiant woman*" (31, 10). This is an alphabetical poem in the original; each line beginning with a new letter of the Hebrew alphabet—the letters following in order. It gives "the five regal ideals of the women's world: loyal devotion to her family; joy in her work; social charitable care for her household and the poor; a cultivated mind; the fear of God."⁽¹⁾ (31, 10-31). And—a very beautiful detail surely—this exemplar of perfect womanhood "*meets the future with a smiling face*" (31, 25).⁽²⁾

SOLOMON'S CANTICLE OF CANTICLES.

The Canticle of Canticles (a Hebrew method of expressing the superlative) means the Greatest of all Can-

(1) *The Women of the Bible*. By Michael Cardinal Faulhaber. English Translation, London 1938; page 14. The Cardinal Archbishop of Munich calls this poem "the Golden ABC of the women's world"; and he shows how applicable it is to the individual and social religious needs of to-day.

(2) In the Hebrew—our version has "*she shall laugh in the latter day*"

ticles; and this little Book of eight short chapters has always been regarded as the finest product of Hebrew poetry, and also the most difficult to understand.⁽¹⁾

In the Hebrew original the name of Solomon is in the title, and until recent times he was believed to have been the inspired writer of this wonderful sacred song. Many things in the Canticle itself lend support to this. The vigour and freshness of style and the quality of the poetry would argue for placing it in the golden age of Hebrew letters.⁽²⁾ Then the author's deep insight into natural history as shown in many beautiful figures of speech would point to that philosopher king as he is described in 3 Kings 4, 33.⁽³⁾

But as against all this the Canticle contains many Aramaic words, and the Aramaic form of the relative pronoun is used throughout. This would indicate that in its final form at least the Canticle belongs to the post-Exilic period. It is probable, therefore, that the Canticle too is the work of one of "the wise men" who had studied the Prophets and the traditional lore—especially the poems and parables of Solomon. It is "a poem of consolation; and it may well belong to the period of the return from Babylon."⁽⁴⁾ This view still leaves the Canticle the work of Solomon in a very real sense. The language, the imagery, and even the doctrine in outline would be his, but adapted by an inspired writer to the religious conditions of a later time. Another argument in favour of this view is the fact that the last seven verses are a collection of three parables not connected with the theme of the Canticle itself. And these also speak of the flourishing condition of religion.

The Canticle is poetry in dialogue. It is not strictly drama; there is lacking dramatic action. It is as a literary

(1) *Histoire De D'Ancien Testament*. Par Mgr. J. B. Pelt, Vol. 2, page 71.

(2) Father Vaccari, S.J., holds the traditional view for these reasons (*I Libri Poetici Della Bibbia*. Rome 1925. Page 285.)

(3) Father Cornely, S.J. (*Compendium Introductionis*, page 361) and Doctor Hugh Popè, O.P. ("Aids," Vol. 2, page 247) hold the older view for this reason.

(4) *Le Cantique Des Cantiques. Commentaire philologique et exegetique*. Par P. Jouon, S.J. Paris 1909, 2nd edition, pages 89-93.

genus peculiar to the East. There are three speakers: the lover (afterwards husband)—representing God; the beloved who is called the Sulamitess—representing Israel, the Chosen People; the chorus or choir of "daughters of Jerusalem"—representing the gentile nations. The Canticle is a pure allegory, a sustained metaphor in which the love of God for His Chosen People is described in terms of human love. It is founded on no historical incident. The literal sense is the allegorical sense; and there is no other literal sense than the allegorical.

Marriage as a symbol of the special bond uniting Yahweh to His Chosen People is found in the Prophets also, e.g. Osee 2; Ezechiel 16; but here the symbolism is developed at greater length. The meaning of all the symbolism is not certainly known; but authors are agreed on much of it. Thus, "the watchmen" (3, 3) or "the keepers" (5, 7) symbolise the guardian angels of the Hebrew nation; "the lilies" (2, 1-2) are the Hebrews; the "vineyard" (1, 5) is the worship of Yahweh; "sleep" (2, 7) is the peace which the possession of God brings; "night" (3, 1) is the time of suffering; "wine" (1, 1; 4, 10) is earthly pleasures.

The Fathers of the Church frequently interpret the Canticle of the union of Christ with His Church; and such an interpretation is eminently justifiable because the New Covenant is the cause and continuation and completion of the Old. Indeed, the imagery of bridegroom and bride is used of Christ and the Church by St. John the Baptist (St. John 3, 29); and by Our Divine Lord Himself (St. Matthew 9, 15; 22, 1-14; 25, 1-13).

The language of the Canticle is often used to describe the union with God by Grace of the individual soul—especially of the Blessed Virgin Mary. But this is rather a *consequent* or *derived* sense than a literal; that is to say, it is a meaning which is deduced as a conclusion from Scriptural premises.

There are six scenes in the Canticle. (a) The mutual affection of lover and beloved (1, 1-2, 7). (b) Their espousals (2, 8-3, 5), a symbol of the Covenant on Mount Sinai. (c) Their marriage, symbol of the solemn entry of

the Ark of the Covenant into the Temple of Jerusalem (3, 6-5, 1). (d) The Sulamitess proves to be an unfaithful wife and is abandoned by her husband for her guilt; she repents; their complete reconciliation (5, 2-6, 2).⁽¹⁾ (e) The mutual fidelity which follows reconciliation, and the joy which it brings (6, 3-8, 4). (f) The triumph of love (8, 5-7).

In the second half of the Canticle the allegory has to yield to the demands of the Messianic doctrine of which it is the medium. There is nothing in mere human affection to serve as an analogy of the divine love and condescension which is shown in the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God. The Canticle, therefore, unites in one the love of a brother and the love of a husband. The sister-spouse of 5,1 desires a brother-spouse in 8, 1-2. Her wish is granted: "*Under the apple tree I have restored thee—there where thy mother bore thee . . .*" (8, 5 according to the Hebrew text). This is an obscure text, but the meaning seems to be: 'Through love I receive thee back into my friendship by becoming thy brother.' The apple tree is a symbol of love. In His infinite love God will restore to man the life of the supernatural; and this will be effected by the stupendous mystery of the Incarnation when the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity will assume human nature—make himself the brother of mankind. The love which moved God so to redeem mankind is then described: "*Love is insatiable as death and Sheol* (the abode of the dead in the Old Testament); *the force of love is fire and flame*" (8, 6).

(1) Father Jouon, S.J., interprets the reconciliation of the return from the Exile in Babylon. He sees in Canticle 1, 1-5, 1 the first alliance from the Exodus to the Fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.; in Canticle 5, 2-8, 14 the new alliance after the return from Babylon, which led on to the Messianic era. (*Commentaire* . . . pages 10-11). This would explain the repetitions which occur, e.g. 3, 3 and 5, 7; 3, 6 and 8, 5; 4, 1 and 6, 5; etc.

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